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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LIBREVILLE 000430

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR A/C FOR LISA KORTE

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TAGS: PGOV PREL GB

SUBJECT: GABON: OPPOSITION ORGANIZES TO PRESENT THEIR CASE

REF: 09 LIBREVILLE 00421

Classified By: Ambassador Eunice Reddick for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶11. (C) A 19-member delegation representing Gabon's political opposition presented their case against the election of Ali Bongo Ondimba to the Ambassador on September 25. The opposition is using its newly-found united front with foreign embassies and international missions to underscore their arguments. Over the next week, opposition candidates that filed official complaints will be appearing before the Constitutional Court. The delegation noted that they expect the Constitutional Court to finish its work and Ali Bongo to be inaugurated on October 5 even though the court has one month to consider the challenges. Despite a lack of confidence in the court, the opposition continues to follow the constitutional process. END SUMMARY.

OPPOSITION APPEARS AS A UNITED FRONT

¶12. (C) For the first time in the process to elect a successor to the late Omar Bongo Ondimba, members of the opposition gathered in one place to voice their collective opinion that Gabon's presidential election results announced on September 2 are fraudulent. The opposition delegation, composed of 19 representatives of opposition parties and former presidential candidates including Andre Mba Obame (independent), Jean Eyeghe Ndong (independent) and Zacharie Myboto (UGDD), visited the Embassy to meet with the Ambassador and EmbOffs on September 25. Also present in the delegation were representatives of former candidates Casimir Oye Mba, Paul Mba Abessole, and Pierre Mamoundou. Besides the U.S., the delegation had already visited the French Embassy and planned to visit the South Africans, the European Commission, UNICEF and UNDP.

¶13. (C) Up until this meeting, the opposition was disorganized and fractious (reftel). The delegation noted that the U.S. Embassy was their second stop in a series of meetings, after a visit to the French. Representatives in the delegation said that they viewed the U.S. as a fair broker in the Gabonese political scene, especially in light of other countries' congratulations of Ali Bongo's victory or public statements suggesting the election was free and fair. Despite their protests, the delegation said they expect Ali Bongo Ondimba to be inaugurated as President of Gabon on October 5.

OPPOSITION STILL REFUSES TO ACKNOWLEDGE BONGO'S WIN

¶4. (C) While the grouping of political faces was new, the complaints were not. The complaints fell into three broad categories. First, that the ruling Democratic Party of Gabon (PDG) used underhanded methods to manipulate the vote count so that Ali Bongo was assured of a victory. The delegates specifically cited irregularities in Port Gentil, heart of opposition to the Bongo family, and Haut Ogooue, home of the Bongo family. The delegation also noted that even considering the numbers announced, the opposition commands more than 60 percent of the vote and that Ali Bongo will need to negotiate with the opposition to rule effectively.

¶5. (C) The second major complaint focused on behavior of the Gabonese security forces. The recent unrest and violence in Port Gentil is unacceptable, they said. They noted that official reports claim three deaths occurred in the city during rioting, but that numerous unofficial reports and personal accounts suggest the number is at least 6 dead with possibly hundreds unaccounted for. As for the capital, security forces in Libreville remain prominent with numerous checkpoints and searches. One member of the delegation said he is afraid to travel home at night for fear that he will be stopped, his valuables confiscated, and then arrested. The delegation called for an independent international investigation into the events in Port Gentil.

¶6. (C) The third common complaint was that the PDG is monopolizing the media. Local television and the state-owned media will not entertain requests for access by the opposition. Andre Mba Obame, who owns substantial media assets in Gabon including a television station, complained that he is being refused access to his own broadcasting

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equipment. He said that the local regulation board will not grant the necessary permission and licenses (which he already owns). Security forces are compounding the problem by restricting access by himself and his employees to the equipment. The delegation requested the Embassy help them carry their story and complaints to the international media.

¶7. (C) In a separate meeting earlier in the day, PolOff met with economist and former presidential candidate Albert Ondo Ossa. Ondo Ossa complained of similar media restrictions saying that a local television show had requested an interview. When he discovered the interview would be pre-taped and then edited, he asked for the interview to be broadcast live or that he get to approve the edits. The television station, funded by the PDG, refused to allow Ondo Ossa approval rights or the ability to go on the air live. Ondo Ossa said the refusal was for fear that he might say something derogatory about the fragile economic state he believes Gabon faces.

L'UNION EDITOR ARRESTED

¶8. (C) Embassy contacts tell us that Albert Yangari, Editor-in-Chief and Director General of the state-owned daily newspaper l'Union was arrested on September 25. When asked about the arrest, the opposition delegation said he had been arrested because of a series of stories in the last three days about the post-election situation in Port Gentil. In those stories, l'Union claims six deaths occurred due to security forces, in contrast to the three deaths the government claims. Further, the l'Union stories exposed a series of beatings and possible human rights abuses by security forces.

OBAMA'S U.N. SPEECH RESONATES

¶9. (C) Already aware of the specifics in President Obama's speech to the U.N. General Assembly, Andra Mba Obame made a

point to reference Obama's statement on democracy and the need to focus on deeds and not words. "This is what we are doing," said Mba Obame.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) This is the first time before or after the election the opposition has spoken with one voice. It was clear in the meeting that the individual candidates are still not entirely comfortable with each other, with many of the statements directed towards their opposition colleagues rather than the EmbOffs. However, the opposition has successfully slowed down the inauguration of Ali Bongo through the use of constitutional measures at their disposal to challenge the election results. Also as a result of the delay, Ali Bongo did not travel to New York for UNGA because he had not been sworn in. The Constitutional Court has one month (from September 19) to consider the opposition's challenges, but apparently is pushing to hear all the candidates' cases over the next week. There may be merit to their speculation that Ali Bongo's inauguration could take place as early as October 5. END COMMENT.

REDDICK